

MEMORANDUM

To: Reporters and Editors
From: Carol Guthrie for Finance Chairman Baucus (D-Mont)
Jill Gerber for Finance Ranking Member Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa)
Re: New CMS Rule on Medicare data-sharing

Finance Chairman Baucus and Ranking Member Grassley commented late today on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' announcement of a new rule allowing the sharing of privacy-protected data from the Medicare program for the purposes of research to better understand trends in health services, to improve quality of care, and to promote efficiency. Baucus and Grassley have previously introduced legislation to improve the study of medical treatments – including the effectiveness and safety of drugs – by giving researchers at federal agencies and university-based and other research organizations highly controlled access to data on hospital, physician and prescription drug benefits that are provided to Medicare beneficiaries.

“I’m pleased that CMS is taking steps to safely allow qualified researchers to use Medicare data for research that will improve the program and the health of the American public. If knowledge is power, sharing knowledge can help strengthen our entire health care system, and that’s why I began promoting the idea of safely sharing Medicare data for research purposes in legislation with Senator Grassley,” said Baucus. **“I will work to make sure that beneficiary information is indeed protected. I also want to ensure Congressional support and federal oversight agencies have access to all Medicare data that they need - including data from the prescription drug benefit - to advise Congress on Medicare and on the usefulness of this rule. Just like doctors decide treatments, Congress needs to base policy decisions on the best available information. I will continue to consider legislation on this issue, to make certain that this data is shared safely, quickly, and in the most useful manner.”**

“CMS’ move will help consumers. The problems with popular diabetes drug Avandia showed the value of making key data available to experienced and credentialed researchers,” Grassley said. **“The drug trials that go on before the Food and Drug Administration approves a drug are no match for the wealth of information that’s available after a drug is on the market and millions of people start taking it. This initiative will tap that valuable information on behalf of public safety and public health while protecting individual privacy and confidentiality. It’s especially important that CMS insisted that research findings based on this data must be made available to the public.”**

For more information on efforts by Baucus and Grassley to achieve Medicare data-sharing in their legislation (S. 1507 in the 110th Congress), visit <http://finance.senate.gov/press/Gpress/2007/prg052407b.pdf>